The Mistakes and Lessons of Elijah House

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Introduction

For quite some time, I have heard about a group called *Elijah House* and its activities. However, as someone working quietly in a small corner of Japan, I only knew of them by rumor. I had never seen their work or felt any influence personally.

Then, late last summer, a senior pastor kindly "ordered" me to investigate this movement. He said it had already spread widely within our denomination and might develop into a serious issue. Wanting to be an "obedient servant," I decided to follow his request faithfully.

As I gathered materials and studied the matter, I discovered that his concern was far from unfounded—the movement contained deep problems. I wrote a short report, sent it to pastors nationwide, and urged caution.

The response was unexpectedly strong. Many pastors expressed appreciation, and I even received reactions from believers outside our denomination. It became clear that Elijah House was causing problems in many regions. Only one written objection arrived—from Rev. Masuda, a board member of our denomination and an active promoter of Elijah House. His letter was also sent to several pastors, so I replied publicly and circulated my response nationwide.

In my first letter, I had asked readers to inform me of any errors, since my investigation was brief. One person outside our denomination, who was well informed about Elijah House, pointed out that one of my quotations about seminar expenses came from an unreliable source.

Soon after I sent my reply to Rev. Masuda, elections were held for our denominational representatives. Rev. Masuda was elected but declined the position and later resigned from the board. I do not know if this was related to my paper, but I have not heard that he withdrew from Elijah House itself. (I considered using his name anonymously, but since the matter was already public, I decided to use it as is.)

This present document was prepared because I was again asked to address this issue at the Kyushu District clergy retreat. This time, however, we agreed not only to discuss Elijah House but also other related “Christian movements,” to help pastors strengthen their understanding and build healthy resistance to false teachings of any kind.

The Beginning of Elijah House

Elijah House was founded in the United States in 1974 by John and Paula Sandford. (Some documents list 1973 or 1975.) John (1929–2002) and Paula (1931–2012) were experienced ministers in a Congregational church.

They had worked with and learned from *Agnes Sanford* (1898–1982), the daughter of missionaries to China and the wife of an Anglican priest. Agnes introduced the concept of “inner healing,” combining Christian terms with mystical and psychological ideas. Her teachings influenced both church and secular circles, but it was John and Paula Sandford who spread them widely among Christians—especially within Pentecostal and “Third Wave” movements. Today Elijah House claims branches in more than twenty countries and is led by their son, Mark Sandford.

The Background of Elijah House

Agnes Sanford was deeply influenced by the psychologists *Sigmund Freud* and *Carl Jung.*
(Modern psychology no longer considers Freud’s or Jung’s theories scientifically valid.)

Freud (1856–1939) taught that human behavior stems from subconscious desires, especially sexual impulses. He divided human development into oral, anal, phallic, and genital stages, claiming that early experiences up to age five determine one’s entire life.

Jung (1875–1961), once Freud’s disciple, broke away and emphasized a “collective unconscious,” blending psychology with occult and spiritual elements. He was a pastor’s son and far more open to mystical ideas.

Influenced by both, John and Paula Sandford combined Jung’s psychology, Eastern mysticism, Agnes Sanford’s “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” their own experiences, and elements of the New Age and hippie movements. Their counseling method mixed Christian faith with occult-style experience.

Elijah House in Japan

Elijah House has an active base in Japan, mainly among charismatic, “Third Wave,” Pentecostal, and fundamentalist groups. It has also spread within our denomination—sometimes only in part, but widely enough to be influential. Several prominent pastors, even from large churches, have supported it.

According to current online information, *Elijah House Japan* lists staff such as:

> **Director:** Masanori & Yumiko Miura
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> **Training Director:** Takako Kobukata
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> **Recommended Ministers:** Rev. Ryoichi Masuda (Grace Community Church)
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> > Rev. Hiroshi Tsukii (Hongo-dai Christ Church)
> >
> > Rev. Tetsuyuki Masuda (City Vision Glory Church)
> >
> > Rev. Motohiko Tasaka (Yokohama New Life Baptist Church)
> >
> > Rev. Yoji Nakamura (Kumamoto Harvest Church)
> >
> > Rev. Hiroshi Sugisaki (Kiryu Christ Church)
>
> **Advisor:** Rev. Eiichi Hamasaki (former pastor of Otsu Baptist Church)

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Photos of their gatherings are displayed on their website and Facebook page, showing many familiar faces.

The Basic Teachings of Elijah House

Elijah House combines biblical terms with what they call *inner healing*, a form of psychological-spiritual therapy. They teach that all human suffering arises from hidden wounds buried in the subconscious—painful experiences from the past that still

influence the present. Healing supposedly occurs when these buried memories are changed into positive ones through prayer and counseling.

They go further than Freud, even claiming that experiences in the mother's womb shape personality. For biblical support, they cite Luke's story of baby John leaping in Elizabeth's womb when Mary visited her—a completely mistaken interpretation.

Their teaching often involves sexual issues: for example, that a mother's sexual activity during pregnancy can traumatize the fetus or that toilet training can create wrong attitudes toward sexuality. Such teachings are not only unscriptural but often crude.

Psychology as a discipline contains much unproven theory, and the ideas behind inner healing are especially speculative. Elijah House builds on these unscientific and unbiblical foundations.

They claim that the source of pain is always the result of past "victimization," not personal sin. The "inner child" or "root" within must be healed to remove the pain. This shifts responsibility away from sin and spiritual struggle and replaces it with emotional self-focus.

The Bible teaches that believers, through Christ's salvation, are freed from the past. The Holy Spirit renews us and gives new life. Scripture never teaches that we must revisit painful experiences to achieve healing.

Elijah House quotes Jeremiah 1:10 and Matthew 3:10 ("lay the axe to the root") to support their view, but these verses have nothing to do with inner healing. Such misuse of Scripture shows a serious lack of sound interpretation.

Their method of uncovering "subconscious memories" often leads to suggestion and manipulation. People may be led to believe false memories of abuse, causing them to accuse family members of crimes that never happened. These so-called healings are psychological and occult, not Christian.

They even invite an "imaginary Jesus" into past memories to change pain into comfort. This is essentially spiritualism—a dangerous counterfeit of faith. The real Christ is living and active now; He does not appear in imaginary scenes.

Such techniques, including role-playing or "acting as Jesus," are unbiblical and open to mind control. When combined with authoritarian "shepherding" or "discipleship" systems, they can easily lead to abuse. In America, similar practices are called *Sozo* ministry and have spread widely.

Elijah House's obsession with sexual issues, drawn from Freudian psychology, can also destroy human dignity and shame people into submission—a common strategy of psychological manipulation.

Elijah House and Evangelicalism

Because the founders were once evangelical pastors, Elijah House still claims to be "evangelical" and frequently uses Scripture. But in reality, its teaching is far from biblical. Many sincere Christians accept it uncritically simply because it uses the Bible's language.

This "emotional fundamentalism" leaves believers vulnerable to all sorts of hybrid teachings—prosperity gospel, positive thinking, or "territorial spirits." Once the door to such confusion opens, it is hard to close.

Elijah House's literalist interpretation of Scripture, such as Exodus 20:5 ("visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children"), leads to the false idea of "generational curses" and "cutting off prayers." In fact, the next verse ("showing mercy to thousands") shows that the phrase was rhetorical, emphasizing God's mercy, not inherited punishment.

Sound biblical understanding requires knowing Hebrew thought and literary methods. Scripture expresses *truth*, not always *factual chronology*. The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew, for example, follows symbolic structure (14-14-14), expressing theological meaning, not historical detail.

To read the Bible as literal fact in every verse is to miss its inspired truth and to open the way for distortions like Elijah House.

Experience-Based Faith

Elijah House is essentially experiential. It values "what works" over truth—a reflection of American pragmatism. Testimonies of emotional relief or church growth are treated as proof of validity.

Experience itself is not wrong. Pentecostal believers, too, value experience—the baptism in the Holy Spirit, healing, and the power of God. Yet we must interpret every experience by Scripture, not the other way around.

When experience becomes the standard of truth, faith turns into emotionalism and self-centered spirituality. Claims of falling, shaking, golden dust, or growing gold teeth are examples of such excesses.

Even within our movement, "prophecy through interpretation of tongues" can slip into experientialism when treated as a mark of divine approval. Paul clearly says, "He who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God." (1 Cor. 14:2)

We must not make unique personal experiences the rule for everyone else. Paul never told others to expect his Damascus-road vision or his journey to the third heaven.

The Restoration Movement

Closely related to experiential faith is the *Restoration Movement*, which seeks to "restore" the early church. While Pentecostalism also looks back to Acts, the Restorationists go further—trying to reinstate early church offices like apostle and prophet.

This has led to self-appointed "apostles" who claim divine authority and demand obedience. The Assemblies of God, both in 1949 and 2000, officially warned against this error.

History shows the danger: in 1915, soon after the Assemblies of God was founded, a third of its members broke away over a "new revelation" that baptism should be performed only "in the name of Jesus." Misreading a single phrase, they divided the church and caused lasting damage.

Other modern versions include "The Tabernacle of David" movement, which calls for 24-hour musical worship based on David's tent. Their interpretation of Amos 9:11 ("I will restore David's fallen tent") mistakes God's promise of Israel's national restoration for a command to modern churches.

Some Restoration groups mix literal interpretation with mystical typology—using whichever suits their claims. This double standard breeds confusion and spiritual pride.

The Assemblies of God wisely avoids extremes, allowing some theological diversity yet maintaining biblical balance.

True Evangelical Faith

We believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible Word of God—the only sufficient authority for faith and life. But we must understand that the Bible conveys *truth* rather than mere *facts.*

In Jewish culture, which shaped Scripture, meaning and event take precedence over time and place. Matthew's arrangement of Jesus' teachings, or his symbolic genealogy, expresses truth through form. Genesis likewise reveals divine truth, not scientific process.

If we confuse truth with factualism, we risk either fundamentalist rigidity or skeptical unbelief. Both are enemies of living faith.

The Bible alone is our final authority. We must not add teachings drawn from psychology, mysticism, or other religions. Christ alone is our mediator; the Holy Spirit alone is our Counselor (*Parakletos*). Human "inner healers" who claim that role trespass upon God's work.

Even genuine prophecy does not equal Scripture in authority. Scripture is uniquely *inspired*; prophecy is not. Therefore, all prophecy must be tested by the Word of God.

A true Pentecostal sermon—rightly interpreted, illuminated by the Spirit, and applied with conviction—is itself prophetic. It proclaims the living Word for today.

Why House Is Not Evangelical Christianity

1. **Misuse of Scripture** – They read isolated verses and import their ideas into the Bible instead of drawing meaning from it.
2. **Non-biblical Core Teaching** – They build on speculative psychology and Spiritual manipulation rather than Scripture.

3. **Contradiction of Their Own Claims** – Though claiming to stand on the Bible, they rely on unproven human theories.
4. **Experientialism** – They prioritize feelings, results, and success over faithfulness to God's Word.
5. **Syncretism** – They mix Christianity with occult and Eastern religious elements.

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Such a system may bring temporary comfort, but it replaces repentance and faith with self-centered healing.

Our Responsibility as Pentecostal Believers

We who hold to sound faith must:

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Remove errors within ourselves. Every denomination has mistakes; ours too. Early Pentecostal leaders were sincere but lacked theological training, which allowed various confusions to remain. We must keep reforming ourselves by the Word.

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Teach correct faith. Our movement has played a central role in modern Pentecostalism. We should continue to do so by example—patiently correcting those who have gone astray, not with pride but with love and gentleness (Gal. 6:1).

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Maintain a gracious community. The Assemblies of God has generally avoided harsh exclusion. It values unity and patience, allowing diversity as long as essential doctrines are not denied. Such gracious flexibility reflects Christ's body more than rigid uniformity.

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Conclusion

Elijah House began with good intentions—to bring healing to wounded hearts—but it has mixed biblical truth with unbiblical ideas, psychology, and mysticism.
Its methods distract believers from Christ's finished work and the Holy Spirit's real ministry.

True healing comes not from exploring imagined pasts but from trusting the living Christ who renews us daily.
Only in Him—and in the clear, inspired Word of God—can our minds and hearts be truly restored.

End of English translation